

MEMORANDUM

March 5, 2010

TO: Council President Nancy Floreen

FROM: Glenn Orlin, Deputy Council Staff Director

SUBJECT: Issues raised by the Rockville and Gaithersburg Mayors and Councils regarding Gaithersburg West Master Plan transportation elements

On March 1 several Councilmembers met with the Mayors and Councils of the Cities of Gaithersburg and Rockville regarding the Gaithersburg West Master Plan. From speaking with Marlene Michaelson and Planning staff I learned of the transportation issues that were raised. You asked that I respond to these issues and those raised in the cities' prior correspondence.

Degree of Interagency coordination. After the Planning Board published its public hearing draft plan in February 2009, the Board and Executive Branch staffs recognized the need for coordination with State and municipal partners. An interagency transportation working group was established to work through alternatives analyses and address stakeholder concerns. This group included participation from the State Highway Administration, Maryland Transit Administration, Montgomery County DOT, and both City staffs. They met frequently through the remainder of 2009 and early 2010 addressing concerns as indicated in the meeting summaries below:

- March 13, 2009: Purpose of the group, topics to be reviewed and schedule.
- March 31: Overview of land use and transportation balance
- April 14: "Fatal flaw" analysis of various transportation recommendations, including interchanges, Key West Avenue, and Belward Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT) Station
- May 19: Various ongoing transportation issues/analysis
- May 26: Review design options for interchanges with focus on Sam Eig Highway/Diamondback Drive design options
- June 5: Prioritize interchanges and review language in Plan staging element
- July 10: Grade separations, CCT, prioritization of infrastructure
- August 21: Interchange impacts, option for Sam Eig Highway extension into Belward site developed by County DOT.
- September 3: Sensitivity of travel demand to alternative strategies
- October 1: Coordinate PHED Committee Responses, define "PHED Committee" scenario
- October 16: Coordinate responses to Council staff and Councilmember Andrews questions
- October 30: MTA analysis of CCT realignment
- December 9: Interchange design alternatives
- December 17: CCT public outreach plans

- December 23: Interchange design alternatives
- January 8, 2010: Interchange design alternatives and context-sensitive guidance

This extensive coordination influenced both the Planning Board's Draft Plan and the subsequent dialogue with the PHED Committee. In particular, the Planning staff and Planning Board Chairman Hanson have indicated concurrence with several changes subsequent to the Planning Board Draft Plan in response to stakeholder concerns, including the cities' concerns:

- Elimination of the 1990 Plan interchange between Great Seneca Highway and Key West Avenue
- Elimination of the 1990 Plan arterial roadway extension of Diamondback Drive east of Sam Eig Highway
- Reduction of the number of through travel lanes on Longdraft Road from four to two
- Designation of Game Preserve Road as a Rustic Road
- Incorporation of the I-270/Gude Drive interchange identified in the City of Rockville master plan.
- Incorporation of language guiding the further study of intersection improvements to foster sustainable and context-sensitive solutions.

Travel forecasting assumptions. The assumptions and results of travel forecasting have been the subject of extensive discussion by the Planning Board, County Council staff, other stakeholders, and the PHED Committee. The bases for the Planning Board Draft Plan assumptions and results are summarized in:

- Attachment A, containing Appendix 7 to the Planning Board Draft Plan. This attachment provides details on the work performed by Planning staff prior to the Planning Board Draft Plan publication. Attachment A can be found by clicking on:
<http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/viewer.shtm#http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/community/gaithersburg/documents/Appendix7.pdf>
- Attachment B, containing our packet for the October 26 PHED Committee meeting. This attachment consists of Planning Staff responses to Council Staff and PHED Committee questions from the PHED Committee's October 1 worksession. Attachment B can be found by clicking on:
http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/council/pdf/agenda/cm/2009/091026/20091026_PHED1.pdf
- Attachment C, containing our packet for the February 1 PHED Committee meeting. This attachment consists of Planning Staff responses to Councilmember Andrews. This attachment also contains our finding that the Planning Board's Draft Gaithersburg West plan provides an appropriate end-state balance between land use and transportation. Attachment C can be found by clicking on:
http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/council/pdf/agenda/cm/2010/100201/20100201_PHED1.pdf

A summary of the responses to concerns voiced on March 1, and described in Attachments A through C, is provided below, with the concerns raised in underlined text:

- The Critical Lane Volume (CLV) standard of 1600 is too high. The proposed CLV standard reflects the County's long-standing policy to promote multimodal equity in part by establishing congestion standards that vary by geographic area reflecting the quality of transit service. Areas with better transit options can accept greater levels of congestion. The Plan proposal for a 1600 CLV standard is consistent with the current Germantown Town Center Policy Area CLV standard. In Attachment B, we suggest phasing in the 1600 CLV standard after the CCT is programmed for construction; this proposal would not affect end-state acceptability.
- The Critical Lane Volume (CLV) technique is the wrong technique for looking at traffic congestion. The CLV technique is currently adopted policy by all three jurisdictions in the development review process, supplemented by operational analysis only in cases where conditions warrant.
- The Metrorail system is already too crowded and will be overwhelmed with the introduction of the CCT and additional growth. The Planning staff statement that WMATA system buildout capacity is not a fatal flaw for planned development in the I-270 corridor is consistent with findings in the MTA analysis of the CCT and WMATA's own assessment of long-range facility needs. Funding, however, remains a critical near-term need for WMATA to be able to attain its theoretical line-haul capacity and for selected station circulation improvements, such as vertical circulation elements within the Shady Grove station.
- Regional transportation impacts have not been adequately accounted for. The analysis of end-state transportation conditions utilizes a regional travel demand forecasting model and anticipated growth well beyond the study area, including the 16,000 new housing units and 56,000 new jobs forecasted to be approved during the next 20 years in the cities of Rockville and Gaithersburg. The balance between land use and transportation is defined by the Relative Arterial Mobility at the policy area level. As indicated in Attachments A and B both the City of Rockville and City of Gaithersburg policy areas are forecasted to operate at acceptable levels per the County's Growth Policy.
- Assumptions regarding non-auto driver mode share (NADMS) goals are unrealistic. The availability of current survey data to assess the current non-auto driver mode share will be enhanced by funding for the Shady Grove Transportation Management District (TMD), a district that requires continuing cooperation from all three jurisdictions. The proposed staging plan requires continued monitoring and progressive achievement toward the mode share goal. While the PHED Committee has not yet reviewed the Gaithersburg West Plan staging element, the County Council's commitment to including mode share goals was again demonstrated in its March 6 straw votes on the White Flint Sector Plan.

Interchanges. The Council has heard concerns that elevated grade-separated interchanges are inappropriate for residential communities and are seen as hindering connectivity from adjacent

communities. The Planning Board Draft Plan proposes some strategic adjustments to the several interchanges already in the 1990 Plan. The determination of specific design characteristics associated with recommended interchanges is typically made in the context of detailed facility planning studies – not in the context of master plans. The feasibility of highway (including grade-separated interchanges) and transit infrastructure in the draft Plan has been examined by the interagency work group of implementing agencies described above, including staff from both Rockville and Gaithersburg.

The need to continue plans for interchanges is driven, in part, by the County's policies to maintain congestion at tolerable levels (even with a 1600 CLV standard) and the desire of adjacent communities to limit the risk of cut-through traffic. In some cases (such as along US 29 in Fairland), grade separated interchanges have been valued as a way to improve pedestrian connectivity across high speed arterials.

The interagency working group evaluated several alternative means for addressing forecasted congestion at key junctions in the study area with a particular focus on the Great Seneca Highway intersections with Muddy Branch Road and Sam Eig Highway. The latter intersection is already on the County's priority list for implementation. The conclusion of the working group analysis of the Muddy Branch Road intersection was that several alternatives are feasible, and selecting a preferred alternative is a subject for future project planning, not master planning. Attachment C contains language developed by the interagency working group to be added to the Plan as a guide toward sustainable, context-sensitive, solutions.

Master Plan staging and implementation. Several comments indicated a concern that the transportation system improvements will fall behind the pace of development. As all three jurisdictions now maintain Adequate Public Facilities Ordinances, there should be a mutual confidence that approved development will only occur as infrastructure comes on line, per the respective development policies. The infrastructure elements in the Planning Board's proposed staging plan provide a "belts and suspenders" approach; certain infrastructure commitments should be made to the traveling community even if the transportation systems are otherwise found adequate by APFO review methods. The PHED Committee will review the details of the staging plan on March 15.